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PSYCHOLOGY / SELF-HELP



Co-dependency

I first became aware of the term co-dependency about five years ago during my own personal journey. At that time the definition that helped me the most was, "other-centered, making decisions based on external influences." However, the definition is not that simple. Though the term co-dependency has been recognized for about 15 years, there is no uniform definition. However, I believe the process of naming is important. Only when we are able to identify a set of behaviors are we able to recognize that pattern in our own lives. When we are able to identify patterns, then we can begin to work toward change.

The following are definitions of co-dependency:

"A codependent person is one who has let another's behavior affect him or her and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behavior." —Melodie Beattie

"An emotional, psychological and behavioral condition that develops as a result of an individual's prolonged exposure to and practice of a set of oppressive rules, rules which prevent the open expression of feeling as well as the direct discussion of personal and interpersonal problems." —Robert Sublai

Kay Hagan in her article, "Co-dependency and the Myth of Recovery," notes several characteristics of co-dependent behavior. They are:

- always checking outside of oneself before making choices.
- taking care of others while sacrificing our own needs, suffering silently, feeling unappreciated and resentful.
- poor self-esteem.
- obsessed with controlling other people's behaviors.
- manipulation by playing a victim, exposing vulnerability or rescuing.
- deriving a sense of self-worth from being needed.

My hope is that this issue will encourage us to continue to grapple with the definition of co-dependency. This issue give stories of how being in contact with an alcoholic or addicted person encourages co-dependency. This issue also questions if the social structures for women encourages co-dependent behavior. Each definition is seeking wholeness and deserves serious attention.

In this issue there are stories of women claiming their own authority and the hope and health that has resulted.

Marlene Kropf notes that as a spiritual director she has seen how co-dependency has resulted in a "lack of a sense of self worth and debilitating images of God." She mentions a number of spiritual disciplines that women have found helpful in their journey to wholeness.

Carol A. Plummer in her article offers some thought-provoking ideas of the consequences of how women are socialized. She sees the term co-dependency as being helpful. However she feels that it takes us on only half of the journey to wholeness. She stresses that we also need to look at the social structures, the context, that oppress women and proposes some ideas for going beyond co-dependency.

Donna J. Neufeld has completed an excellent bibliography which will provide valuable additional reading on this topic. Three vignettes, which she also wrote, allow us to look at our own mindset. "Do we accept less responsibility for ourselves and question or even deny our own ability?"

The writers in this issue have done an excellent job in presenting thought-provoking and challenging ideas. May we be challenged to continue on our journey toward wholeness.

Brenda Glanzer graduated this past May from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries with a Masters of Divinity. She is currently candidating for a pastoral position.

4. Strengthening our self for the sake of our own fulfillment and self-realization may not be accepted as sufficient reason for allowing ourselves to develop fully.

It takes courage and determination to counter the seeds that have "matured" into a full-grown co-dependency cycle.

Vignette 2

There is something about a toad that has always appealed to me. Maybe it is the way it seems to "snuggle" in my warm hand when I "pet" it. Through the years I have been bothered by the decreasing number of toads sighted on our night walks through the college campus near our home.

On this particular night I notice some husky college men playing "football" on the college green. Abruptly, one guy runs from the game, shouting, "That's cruel!" On second look, I see they are using a live frog as a football. "Is that a frog they are kicking?" I ask my husband. "Yes, it is." Alarmed, I tell him to "Stop them!" "Oh, let's go," he says somewhat hesitantly. Stubbornly I insist, "No, go tell them to quit." "We'll miss the 10:00 news if we don't keep up our pace," he says resolutely.

Angry, I walk over to the "football" players. "Hey guys, what are you doing?" "Nothing," as he hikes the toad for his teammate to kick. "Don't do that; that hurts." "We're not hurting anything," He heaves the wounded toad into the bushes and runs off.

Thoughts on this example:

1. When we habitually diminish our own ability to meet our needs, (in order to maintain a relationship), we tend to expect the male to meet those needs ("Go tell them to quit.") resulting in efforts to control his behavior.
2. Our value system and sense of decency can be undermined when we stifle our ability to respond. We then tend to live with our guilt or to blame significant others (i.e. spouse) who we see as having more control over our external situations.
3. Sometimes it takes having our cup overflow in anger before we give ourselves permission to express our "self."
4. As we become less able to fulfill "self," and thus, more childlike, we tend to increasingly expect and influence the other to "parent" us.

by Donna J. Neufeld

Seeds of Co-dependency

Seeds of co-dependent attitudes are sown early in life and nurtured as the expectations of a patriarchal society are played out in our families. As women, encouraged by society to deself, defer to, and depend on males, we may automatically, but unintentionally, participate in the development of a dependency mind-set that accepts less responsibility for ourselves and also causes us to question, even deny, our own abilities, thus supporting the co-dependency cycle.

Vignette 1

"I am fixing fence with my elderly father on his farm. A wire needs to be stapled to the post. I see it needs to be done and debate about doing it. Dad is busy with the wire stretcher. Hammer in hand, I start to nail the staple. Will I lose the staple in the tall grass? Will I get it in straight? I tap it gently. I could let Dad finish it. He would do a better job and get it right. I fumble around. But wait...this kind of pounding motion would not be good for his heart. He could have a heart attack right here in the field. Bang! Bang! Bang! Three swift pounds and the staple is in."

Thoughts on this example:

1. The messages we give ourselves are instrumental in determining our participation in co-dependent behavior.
2. Dependency experiences accumulated throughout a woman's developmental years may result in the loss of individual skills, strengths, and person empowerment, in the interest of maintaining a pseudo "secure" relationship.
3. The pattern of behavior developed with one's father can automatically transfer to our expectations of other male figures throughout our life.

Vignette 3

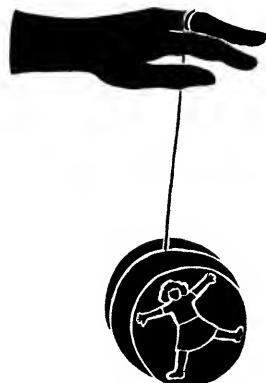
As two thinking, intelligent, young adult friends wait for their food at a restaurant, they pass the time drawing a map of the U.S. with the crayons provided by the restaurant. Jane: "...and Mississippi is down here along the coast." John: "Oh no. Mississippi isn't on the coast." Jane: "Yes, I think it is."

John: (with authority) "I'm sure Mississippi is not on the coast."

Jane ponders silently for a moment: I know it's got to be on the coast because I swam in the Gulf of Mexico while visiting my cousins in Mississippi...but he sounds so confident...

Thoughts on this example:

1. Addictive co-dependent relationships develop as both individuals feel pressured to be something other than who we really are in order to be accepted by ourselves and others. (In order to feel "OK" John has to "know" and Jane has to "not know" if she is to please/caretake John; or Jane can give herself permission to "know" depending on how much she needs John's approval in determining her own value.)



2. Marriages/relationships built on the phoniness of needing our partner to behave in a certain way in order for us to feel OK about ourselves, can indicate our participation in an ungratifying dysfunctional system.

Donna Kaufman Neufeld, a social work educator at Tabor and Bethel Colleges, presently facilitates training experiences on various mental health issues. A licensed psychotherapist in private practice in North Newton, Kan., she works with individual, marriage, and family concerns.



Journey to Recovery

All I ever wanted from life was the perfect family. Like many other women, I believed that once married, I became an extension of my husband and children. No matter how "liberated" I may have appeared to others, my basic sense of self-worth was tied up in my roles of wife and mother. In my head, I "needed" a husband and children to validate my reason for being.

It took the tragedy of our children's drug and alcohol abuse to bring me to my senses. Jesus' observation that we have to lose our life to save it is literally true! And while I eventually worked through my guilt where I could accept that I didn't cause our children to drink, my enabling still contributed to their continued use. My need to control, to look and feel like a good mother, to do things for them, kept them from learning from experiences. When they lied, missed school, stole, forged checks, ran away from home, came home stoned, I always found ways to explain away their behavior and cover up for them. Out of love, of course!

Looking back, I'm astounded that we were able to play the denial game for over five years. Even when one child was caught smoking pot at school, and ran away not once, but twice. Even when another quit school in his senior year and was so spaced out and dysfunctional that he couldn't hold a job. Even when the third was not only arrested, but attempted suicide and wrecked three cars. Even when all three ran with kids we knew were using drugs. Even when our abusers were hostile, obscene, incorrigible and violent. Eventually, things got so bad that my husband and I could not deal with the chaos and pain anymore. At that point we began attending Families Anonymous, (FA) a twelve step program for parents of emotionally disturbed and addicted children, but let me hasten to add, we initially went to get help for our son's friend's mother...because her son definitely had a drug problem!

In FA we learned that we were co-dependents, that we were as sick or sicker than our abusers. We learned to see ourselves as individuals with legitimate rights and needs. We learned to take the focus off our abusers and put it on ourselves where it belonged. To our surprise, we discovered

we could be happy even when our children were not doing well. We started sleeping at night.

Over a period of time we accepted addiction as a family disease and let go of our guilt. Realizing that we hadn't caused our kids to drink, that we couldn't cure or control their drinking, was freeing. We realized that working on ourselves helped them. As we stopped accepting the blame for their addictions, making excuses, paying their bills and bailing them out, we opened the way for them to change and seek treatment for themselves.

It is a sad but true fact that once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic. The same is true for co-dependency. While both are incurable diseases, both are treatable. At this point in time, the most effective treatment for addictions and co-dependency are twelve step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, Narcotics Anonymous, Families Anonymous, etc.



I anticipate participating in a twelve step program for the rest of my life. I will always need the reinforcement and insight I get by attending meetings and reading the literature. I, as a recovering enabler or co-dependent, need frequent reminders that I can't change others. But I can change myself, and that's the most loving thing I can do!

The twelve steps offered a wonderful gift to me, for they have opened up the scriptures in ways I could never have anticipated. My faith has blossomed. The program has given me new ways of seeing, being, and doing. I am now a better wife, mother, and pastor.

Each week at our FA meeting we go over several readings which sum up the FA philosophy. All speak to our ongoing struggles with co-dependency, yet one in particular articulates ways we can stand with those in need without violating their uniqueness. I see it as a distillation of Jesus' teachings and I offer it to you in your journey from co-dependency to recovery.

My role as helper is not to DO things for the person I am trying to help, but to BE things; not to try to control and change his actions, but through understanding and awareness, to change my reactions. I will change my negatives to positives; fear to faith; contempt for what he does to respect for the potential within him; hostility to understanding; and manipulation or over-protectiveness to release with love, not trying to make him fit a standard or image, but giving him an opportunity to pursue his own destiny, regardless of what his choice may be. I will change my dominance to encouragement; panic to serenity; the inertia of despair to the energy of my own personal growth; and self-justification to self-understanding.

Self-pity blocks effective action. The more I indulge in it, the more I feel that the answer to my problem is a change in others and in society, not in myself. Thus I become a hopeless case.

Exhaustion is the result when I use my energy in mulling over the past with regret, or in trying to figure ways to escape a future that has yet to arrive. Projecting an image of the future and anxiously hovering over it, for fear that it will or it won't come true uses all of my energy and leaves me unable to live today. Yet living **TODAY** is the only way to have a life.

I will have no thought for the future actions of others, neither expecting them to be better or worse as time goes on, for in such expectations I am really trying to create. I will love and let be.

All people are always changing. If I try to judge them, I do so only on what I think I know of them, failing to realize that there is much I do not know. I will give others credit for attempts at progress and for having had many victories which are unknown.

I, too, am always changing, and I can make that change a constructive one, if I am willing. I **CAN CHANGE MYSELF.** Others, I can only love.

If you are interested in starting a Families Anonymous chapter in your area, write to Families Anonymous, Inc.,

• Bibliography

- Atwood, Margaret. *A Handmaid's Tale*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986. An intriguing story of a new order in the U.S. in which women, totally subordinate and of use only as "birthing vessels", struggle with issues of control, submission, and "neutralizing the mind" for the sake of survival.
- Beattie, Melody. *Beyond CoDependency*. San Francisco:

Harper Hazelden, 1989.
Outlines a healthy recovery process, which transforms relapses into an affirmed self who breaks from shame, fatal attractions, and victim stances.

- Beattie, Melody. *Codependent No More*. San Francisco: Harper Hazelden, 1987. Describes the self-defeating behaviors that result in efforts to deny ourselves and control the behavior of others.

P.O. Box 528, Van Nuys, CA 91408 or call 1-818-989-7841. If you have had no experience with twelve step meetings, ask a veteran from Al-Anon to help you for a period of time.

The author requests to remain anonymous.



- Brownmiller, Susan. *Femininity*. New York: Linden Press, 1984. Well-documented historical account of the meaning, use, and promotion of "femininity" in our culture. Shows how "femininity has been used to subjugate, humble, "hobble", and quiet women with the intent of magnifying the differences of the "thinking" man and the "made-to-please" woman.

- Dowling, Colette. *The Cinderella Complex*. New York: Simon and

powerful effects. I knew we had something shameful to hide and a secret to keep. I also knew that strong emotions were not acceptable and that expressing how I felt about things could make my parents uncomfortable and unpredictable. We lived by the three rules of co-dependent households: don't talk, don't trust, don't feel.

Though I didn't realize it at the time, my parents were just carrying on the patterns that they learned in their families of origin. My father died when I was 17 and I developed a very dependent relationship with my mother. In co-dependent families, children behave according to a subconsciously adopted role in the family. I had become the placator, trying to make our family happy but especially to fill the loneliness in my mother's life.

At age 19 I married an adult child of an alcoholic and I came to realize that both of us were expecting out of marriage an opportunity to continue to use our "survival skills" we learned so well in our homes. Since co-dependents have mastered a certain style of reacting to circumstances, they naturally feel high anxiety unless they remain in a co-dependent situation. As a pastoral family, we threw ourselves into ministering to a church, gave birth to our four children in six years, and though I felt confusion, pain and anger during those years, I buried it. I was convinced that Christians didn't feel the "inappropriate" feelings that I possessed. I felt ashamed for my lack of spirituality and so isolated myself emotionally while remaining overactive in our church life.

There is an expression that says "anger conquers when unresolved." Two years ago I realized that I was being conquered. All my defenses against feeling pain and recalling my past were inadequate ways of dealing with life and simply were not working anymore.

My quest for recovery began when I received a note from an old friend mentioning the support she found in an ACOA group. Then I discovered that my younger sister was receiving help from an ACOA group meeting in her city. In the weekly meetings that I started attending I began to identify with other adults who had grown up in homes like mine and who were discovering a new way to life.

In these first two years of recovery I have felt more sadness and yet experienced more joy than I can remember in the previous 31 years of my life. Where my emotional life had been characterized by numbness, now I feel a whole range of emotions. I discovered the truth that when our energy is spent suppressing negative feelings, we are unable to feel positive emotions as well. I have learned that I can make

Making Choices

"Hi. I'm Leigh Anne and I'm an ACOA (Adult Child of an Alcoholic)." I first said these words two years ago. I didn't fully understand what they meant and had never heard of co-dependency, but I did know that my life was out of control and that I needed help. My voice trembled as I shared, but I sensed warmth, support and identification from the other people in that circle. I didn't realize that night that I was beginning a long and often painful journey toward health and a happier life, a journey to recovery.

Reknowned sociologist Virginia Satir said that many people are living in an emotional jail without realizing it. I felt like a prisoner, but I didn't know who my jailer was. As I read the list of characteristics of co-dependents that night, I identified myself in almost every category. I was afraid of angry people and any personal criticism. I lived life as a reactor than an actor. I felt guilt about standing up for myself, sometimes created crises for myself, suppressed both negative and positive emotion, and had a sense of powerlessness to make choices in my life. I didn't understand why I felt these things, and so a process of "emerging awareness" began as I recalled and dealt with some of the pain from my past.

Not all co-dependents have alcoholics or drug dependents in their nuclear families. Sometimes the dependent person is not a parent but a grandparent or significant other. Even when the dependence is generations removed, it has influence on the behavior of the rest of the family. In my case my father was an alcoholic and my mother was dependent on tranquilizers. Although the drinking in our house was hidden from the children, I now know I felt its

Schuster, 1981. Psychological dependency—the deep wish to be taken care of by others is seen as the main force underlying women's retreat from self-realization. Like Cinderella, women continue to wait for something external to enlighten their lives.

• **Fisher, Roger, and William Ury. *Getting to Yes, Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.* New York: Penguin Books, 1981. A method of win-win**

negotiation in which both parties maintain their independence, dignity and self. Useful for persons who choose to maneuver their world as well as maintaining their "people-pleasing" skills.

• **Goodrich, Thelma, and Cheryl Nampage, Barbara Ellman, Kris Halstead. *Feminist Family Therapy—a Casebook.* New York: Norton and Company, 1988. Therapists and families learn to think independently,**

healthy choices—I do not need to live my life as a victim of either circumstances or other people's choices. Where for years I had lost myself and didn't feel I had an identity other than being a pastor's wife and mother, I renewed my interest in art and chose new friends that helped me grow. I learned that it is okay to make a mistake and that being Christian means being human. Katherine Mansfield wrote, "when we begin to take our failures non-seriously, it means we are ceasing to be afraid of them. It is of immense importance to learn to laugh at ourselves." As time goes on, I am able to take life a little less seriously and have fun!



I am still struggling with the difference between selfishness and self-caring. I had thought that Christianity taught us to give until we have nothing left, and so I felt empty and resentful much of the time. I didn't understand that I couldn't love my neighbor as myself when I couldn't even admit to liking myself. Now I am learning the meaning of balance—in the middle of a busy week taking care of children and attending church activities I often make time for coffee with a friend, an art class, or a date with my husband. Sometimes I do all three! Rather than feeling selfish, I end up feeling replenished. As I take better care of me, I encourage my family and friends to take good care of themselves as well.

In the days ahead I will continue to discover who I am and what my responsibility to God, myself, and others is. I know now through being in recovery that I am only responsible for my own thoughts, actions, and feelings. I can't make decisions for or control others' behavior. Eleanor Roosevelt wrote:

"Somewhere along the line of development we discover what we really are and then we make our real decision for which we are responsible. Make that decision primarily for yourself because you can never live anyone else's life, not

tolerate uncertainty, and confront inequality, thus enhancing the development of all family members.

• **Lerner, Harriet Goldhor. *The Dance of Intimacy.* New York: Harper and Row, 1989. "A Woman's Guide to courageous acts of change in key relationships."**

• **Lichtenberg, Philip. *Getting Even: The Equalizing Law of Relationship.* Md: University Press of America, 1988.**

Transforming the power imbalance of authoritarianism into the equality of egalitarianism results in true vitality in relationships.

• **Schaef, Anne Wilson. *Escape From Intimacy.* San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989. Describes how sex, romance and relationships can be addictions that serve as "fixes" for a society's unfulfilled yearnings for true intimacy.**

even your own child's...the influence you exert is through your own life and what you become yourself."

The journey toward health in my social and emotional life is reflected in my spiritual life as well. My picture of God when I began recovery was limited to that of a punitive, harsh father. I condemned myself so readily for my imperfections that it was easy for me to believe that God was ready to condemn me if I made too many mistakes. My spiritual life was controlled and perfectionistic; I measured my relationship with God by how many times a week I had devotions or how many committees I served on at church.

I see now that I was giving God less credit than I gave myself as a parent to my children—I knew I loved them unconditionally but couldn't comprehend God loving me in the same way. I feel that the church emphasizes the importance of having a "perfect Christian family"; and that standard of sinlessness causes us to hide our pain, our failures, and our feelings. Those defenses that even Christians develop to deny real problems and emotions are co-dependency as well, and can be present even when no addictions are evident. Howard Friend writes:

"If Anne Wilson Schaef is right, that we are a 'nation of addicts' and that 'the culture itself is the codependent' how do churches and pastors participate in, support, collude with that destructive process? ...If Paulo Freire is right, that the 'oppressor-oppressed contradiction' is the basic posture twisting and distorting life in society, and that the church is far more oppressor liberator, than have we the courage to ask how we, in the way we play our...role, and our churches, in the way they relate to their people and their community, bind more than free?"

Although our churches may have unwittingly fostered some unhealthy attitudes in the past, partially because they are composed of people with problems, now we have an opportunity to help others by learning about health in the Christian community. Christ paid too high a price for our freedom for the church to be anything but a liberator.

Now when I say "Hi, I'm Leigh Anne and I'm an ACOA" I feel hope and excitement about what the future holds instead of the fear I felt two years ago. As illness is contagious, so is health. I'm looking forward to becoming more healthy and sharing that with others in the years to come.

The author wishes to remain anonymous.



Unraveling the Tangle of Co-Dependency

The phone rang. It was our son, John, in his junior year of college. Early in the conversation he admitted that things were not going well for him and that he suspected he was failing most of his courses. He mentioned that someone from the personnel office at school had suggested that he go to a nearby treatment center for an evaluation. We felt relief at the prospect of help for him. We also felt some alarm that his problem was severe enough to come to the attention of the student personnel staff. We felt angry and let down. How could this happen to us?

For religious reasons, there was never alcohol use in either of our parental homes, or in ours. We viewed alcoholism as a self-inflicted problem, something of a moral weakness.

We encouraged John to make an appointment for an evaluation. At first he was reluctant, but after our emphatic urging, he did finally agree to follow through. We asked that he report back to us after doing this. We now know that he was unusually compliant for an addicted young adult. The importance he placed on our recommendation illustrates his dependence on us.

After his second appointment he was diagnosed as chemically dependent. John made the next phone call from the treatment center to let us know of his decision to commit himself for treatment. He expressed great relief that he was getting the help he so desperately needed. We, too, felt relief as well as shock and disbelief, followed by apprehension as to how this would affect our family. Although his complying with our wishes brought the desired result of his going into treatment, we did not know then how his dependency on alcohol would affect relationships.

We were introduced to the concept of enabling through a Christian counselor. Reading *Under the Influence* by Milan and Ketcham, we learned that because of the way the body of an alcoholic metabolizes alcohol, the person becomes

addicted. Some people are born with the physical predisposition to become alcoholic. Coming to understand alcoholism as having primarily a physical basis was only the beginning of understanding addiction and our involvement in it. We were not familiar with the concept of co-dependency at this time.

John's treatment was the beginning of his road to recovery. Unfortunately, because we were living approximately 1000 miles from where he was in treatment, we could not be involved in family therapy. As a result, our recovery was delayed and we had to learn the long, hard way how to deal with our relationship.

Another problem we faced was the enormous expense incurred by six weeks of treatment. John's insurance policy paid very little of his bill. How to meet this obligation became something of a dilemma. The treatment center was, understandably, most eager that it be paid. Although it was a co-dependent thing to do, we paid it, because John had no assets.

The warning signs of addiction in an adolescent are hard to recognize because they are the same as normal adolescent behaviors, only they become greatly intensified. Like all adolescents who become addicted, John's emotional development went on hold. There were frequent outbursts of anger and periods of sullenness along with constant baiting and trying to draw us into an argument. He was always on the opposite side of any issue. At times he appeared to be on the verge of physical violence. John had become addicted in his stormy adolescence. As a result of these behaviors, John had become alienated from his sister, and our family became somewhat dysfunctional. Thus his adolescence continued for 10 years. Yet we believed that since he was recovering from chemical dependency, our relationship would now be normal.

There are many definitions of co-dependency ranging from "disease akin to alcoholism, chronic and fatal, without treatment" (*U.S. News & World Report*, 9/11/89, p. 73) to "a normal response to addiction that nearly everyone has" (*Alcoholism & Addiction*, 9/10/85, p.9). Co-dependency results from the stress produced by living in a committed relationship with an alcoholic. Living with an addicted person triggers excessive caretaking, suppression of one's needs and strained relationships.

After John's treatment he continued to live with us although he was legally an adult. The fact that he was financially dependent on us complicated things even more. He did have a job and began paying back what we had loaned

him for college, a step on the road to recovery.

About six months after graduation John found himself with very little work. This became one of our most trying times. When we urged him to look for work, he admitted that he was unsure of what he wanted and didn't want to get stuck in some dead-end, undesirable job. Later, he confided that he was scared of looking for work.

During his underemployment John continued to attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) regularly, a very important part of recovery. Because he had a car, other AA members would frequently call him and ask for rides. Sometimes he told them "no" because he felt they were becoming too dependent on him. We wondered if we should do the same with him. We knew that he was too dependent on us, but we would have denied that we were dependent on him.

At our suggestion that we all seek professional help, John refused. He felt that he had already been taken apart piece by piece and put back together when he was in treatment. He had had enough. We established an understanding with him that we, as his parents, needed emotional support and that we would find it where we could, mostly with friends.

After a few months of increasing dependency on John's part, my frustration and rage built up to the point where I confronted him with anger. Although I was not consciously aware of it at the time, that was a step in the direction away from co-dependency. John found work and last summer moved out on his own, a very important milestone for him and for us.



John's unwholesome dependency on us and our very tangled relationship did not necessarily mean that he should leave home. It was important for us to set goals and take

a long view, and yet we had to live one day at a time with our son. Dysfunctional relationships take time to change. Our co-dependent relationship, while not healthy, could not be instantly changed. If he had still been drinking during this time we may have handled the situation differently. Although friends and therapists were advising us to push him out of the nest, we decided to err on the side of grace and give him the time he needed to become independent of us. We have not regretted that decision.

In looking back, we feel that if we had been able to participate in family therapy when John went into treatment, we would have been better able to identify the needs that we brought to this co-dependent relationship and the needs that came as a result of it. While John was in treatment he was able to express that he had felt unloved by his father. Now he was overcoming an addiction and trying to become an adult. It was inevitable that every circuit of our relationship became overloaded. My husband, especially, needed help in letting go and not feeling that he had to "fix" John or make up for a hurtful past. The guilt of the co-dependent was there. Recently, a counselor told him to deal with his own pain and forget about John's .

Our relationship in recent months has been comfortable and easy. John calls frequently and asks his father's advice on carpentry projects or car repairs. He occasionally drops in for a home-cooked meal. We are enjoying this phase and look forward to further growth.

There is still some ambivalence and ambiguity regarding our co-dependency. John, while not dependent on alcohol, still depends on me for help in balancing his checkbook. He still receives mail at our address which necessitates regular contact. I still want to ask him if he has taken care of his health insurance or his student loan. My husband is considering helping him with a woodworking project that is beyond John's ability, knowing that there are risks involved. Hopefully, with time, these issues too will be resolved.

The author requests to remain anonymous.

Since fitting in is important to us as social beings, this often subtle rejection of assertiveness has reinforced women in their 'co-dependency.'

by Carol A. Plummer

Refusing Co-dependency

As a therapist and feminist, I have observed the incredible growth of the "co-dependency movement" with awe, appreciation, and skepticism. I am awed that in less than a decade a word and concept has become so popular. I am appreciative of the ways the concept has encouraged women in particular to question focusing on everyone but themselves. I am skeptical because the acceptance of the label "co-dependent" has been easy for women because it comes dangerously close to holding them personally responsible for every part of their lives.

My increasing interest led me to research the issue, read the popular books of the co-dependency genre, and think more about both the value I see coming from "co-dependency" awareness and my increasing discomfort as I heard and saw its application. Precisely because so many women found this concept to be helpful in their personal growth, the idea obviously had validity. However, my examination also made me aware of some inherent problems with the idea of "co-dependency."

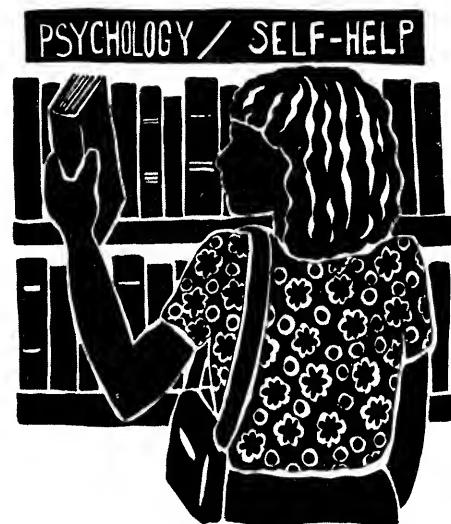
What Is The Definition?

As I read the latest popular books on co-dependency, I became aware that there is no uniform definition for this term. The word is too new to have been included in dictionaries. In scanning the books of a "recovery" section in a bookstore, I found nine books with a 1989 copyright telling people what to do about their co-dependency. Yet each had a different explanation of what it IS! If we don't know exactly what it is, how do we know if we have this "disease," and how can we figure out ways to "cure" it?

In reading between the lines, and condensing various author's ideas, it appears that definitions can be loosely associated under two general categories:

1. Someone who loves an alcoholic or addict.
2. Someone who behaves in ways to try to control or manipulate the behavior of another person (often an alcoholic or addict).

The first definition categorized all people who live with or love a person troubled by substance abuse. These people, by definition, become co-dependents as long as they stick around. Somehow their very existence, or coping styles, maintain the drinking or drugging of their loved one. Some experts state that for every alcoholic there are one or more co-dependents. Others have suggested that co-dependency is a "disease process in its own right" and that co-dependents are even sicker than the alcoholic.



The second definition focuses more on specific behaviors characterizing the "co-dependent," rather than purely the substance abuse of their partner/loved one. In a sense, it narrows the definition since it examines behaviors rather than just that someone is close to an alcoholic/addict. At the same time, it makes the definition even more all-inclusive. ANYONE can be "co-dependent," not just partners to alcoholics/addicts, but also people in any relationship or no relationship at all. One author suggested that 96 percent of the population is "co-dependent," making this affliction the norm. This second definition is probably more generally accepted for several reasons: 1. We can potentially change behaviors, so it offers some hope short of leaving our loved ones. 2. Most everyone can identify with some of the behaviors described.

What are the behaviors deemed co-dependent? One client told me that pouring her husband's liquor down the drain was "typically co-dependent." Another wears herself out caring for an Alzheimer patient, working full-time and volunteering for numerous worthwhile community projects; she calls this co-dependency. A passive woman does not intervene when her husband hits the children, even

"Going beyond co-dependency, our learned way of coping in the world, necessitates becoming self-centered."

though she disagrees, so she is "co-dependent," says my colleague in a staff meeting.

The Context of Co-Dependency

It is a little-discussed fact that most "co-dependents" are women. In fact, scratching just a little beneath the surface shows us that co-dependency is living out the teachings of being a well-socialized female. Females are taught to be other-focused, self-sacrificing, "nice," giving, longsuffering, and understanding. This female socialization has resulted in some of the following (all of which are seen as "signs" of co-dependency): feelings of depression, tendencies toward "perfectionism", anxiety, excessive reliance on others, stress-related medical illness, a victim of recurrent physical or sexual abuse and low self-esteem.

Examining co-dependency in the light of the role of women in this society makes it quickly obvious that co-dependency is NOT gender-neutral. Women "get" it more than men. In fact, if women don't have the "disease," it is only because they have worked very hard against their gender socialization. They have had to fight their daily training by schools, families, churches, and friends to be "good girls," and opted instead for directness, assertiveness, and self-reliance. Oftentimes, their refusal to be co-dependent has been met with rejection and criticism by both men and women who feel uncomfortable with their changes. Since fitting in is important to us as social beings, this often-subtle rejection of assertiveness has reinforced women in their "co-dependency."

Co-dependency is, in fact, a smorgasboard of behaviors used by ALL TYPES of oppressed people when with their oppressors. It is a set of survival skills when one is in a subservient position, economically, emotionally, politically, or spiritually. The list of co-dependent characteristics above is true not only of women, but also of workers with their bosses or the poor with those in power. Telling women to "heal themselves" in a culture which trains them in co-dependency cannot work without transforming the context of their behaviors. The individual solution provides a map to go only half the distance.

What's So Bad About Co-Dependency?

Co-dependency exists, in that many actions and people are labeled such. Clearly, behaving in ways that consider the feelings of others, or that focus on the changes OTHERS need to make, will lead one down a dead end street. We can only change ourselves. Still, there is no denying that we impact on each other; we are interdependent and that is not necessarily a bad way to be. However, honestly, most

of us CAN identify times when we were more concerned with how to change another person than with how to change ourselves. EVEN IF THAT OTHER PERSON REALLY DIDN'T WANT OUR HELP—OR DIDN'T EVEN WANT TO CHANGE! Experts state that co-dependents have a strong need for control, so they "work on" other people, especially their closest friends, children, or spouses. It is no surprise that this job would be frustrating and yield few results.

For some women, non co-dependent alternatives do not exist. This is one reason that the CONTEXT of co-dependency must be recognized. Battered women, rape victims, incest survivors, or economically dependent wives, may not know other ways to survive. Rather than fault these women for their "enabling" or co-dependent patterns, it is important that we encourage the social changes which make healthy interactions possible. Growing up, I learned that girls took care of boys and women obeyed men. Now, if I have difficulty NOT doing this as an adult, it seems unfair for me to be faulted for learning my lessons so well!

Christian women, in particular, are well-trained in putting their own needs aside for the needs of others. This is not all bad, in that many of us are giving and sharing. In fact, a writer in the *Detroit Free Press* said that "working on my co-dependency" often looks like someone just finding an excuse to be rude. For myself, it was difficult initially to resolve conflicts between Christian values and learning assertiveness (which is really the antithesis of co-dependency). Not until I realized it was NOT LOVING to let someone else mistreat me did I feel at peace with this shift from co-dependency (my female AND Christian socialization) to assertiveness and self-care.

The Value of Co-Dependency Awareness

While the lack of clarity on the definition is a problem, it would not be helpful to summarily dismiss what co-dependency awareness has offered to many women. It has given an acceptable and understandable name to an experience women have: being frustrated in their attempts to change, support, or help OTHERS. This popular movement has given women support groups that are frequent, easily accessible, and sometimes even free (such as Al-Anon). Much as with feminist consciousness-raising groups of the early 1970's, these groups have provided powerful insights and support so that women learn they are not alone—and they are not crazy.

The fact is: shedding co-dependency FEELS GOOD! For



centuries, good women either had no anger or never expressed it. Good women always put others first and swallowed hard when they felt mistreated. Good women developed physical and emotional problems from all that swallowing. Now a movement has come along that says it's OK to feel, to set boundaries, to decide what is good for you. It's OK if you can't control everyone and everything in the world. These ideas have the potential to free many of the chains of "shoulds" which create low self-esteem and ulcers.

More than anything, co-dependency ideology gives women permission to act in their own best interest and relieves them of the burden of making everyone else happy. This gives incredible hope for change, since you become the creator of your own destiny. Someone else doesn't have to act a certain way in order for you to be happy. You make yourself happy. This message of hope is a welcome one for those who have struggled for years with the need to be perfect. Hope is in itself a powerful healer.

Going Beyond Co-Dependency: The Self-Centered Woman

Whenever I reclaim the term "self-centered" and use it in talks, women cringe. This is the label that we have often worked to avoid our whole lives. "Martyr" we can live with. "Endlessly giving" sounds even flattering. But self-centered is what we tell our kids not to be! "Self-centered" embodies all that stops us in our tracks when we're uncertain of our new direction and sends us running home to old familiar ways. Isn't self-centered what we imagine when we think of greedy capitalists, and those who willingly pollute the earth for profit?

Going beyond co-dependency, our learned way of coping in the world, necessitates becoming self-centered. By self-centered, I mean both centered IN the self and ON the self. Sometimes we hear someone state that they are "off center"—not quite at their best. If co-dependency is other-centered, centering on self is the obvious opposite. To be centered IN the self, we need to build self-esteem and reside IN our body. This centering may be assisted through good diet, adequate exercise, an active prayer life, focused breathing, or meditation. It is keeping your center INSIDE you, rather than creating a dependency so that you would "die" without a relationship, job, children at home, etc. Centering ON the self, on the other hand, means directing efforts at changing one's life experiences ON ONESELF. It doesn't work to always see the potential in another and base your fulfillment on pulling it out of them. You can only pull happiness, like the magical bunny from the hat, out of YOURSELF. All efforts to focus on another

will ultimately fail unless that person, almost coincidentally, decides to change. Becoming self-centered is the first step out of co-dependency as a lifestyle.

Step two out of co-dependency is not mentioned in much of the literature and appears to be the "fatal flaw" of that ideology. While women are working on becoming more "self-centered," the fact remains that not all is well, or equal, in the world. Especially from an international perspective, it is clear that individual self-help answers are incomplete. At best, individualistic solutions are inadequate, for they provide us a map that goes half the distance. At worst, they ignore the catch-22 political and social dilemmas of women today. The self-help approach when taken alone turns the continued frustration back at the woman in blame. As we attach new labels to phenomenon, we need to examine the assumptions/denials inherent in these terms. For example, as "recovery" becomes something we are all doing from something (food, alcohol, relationships), what is it that we are really recovering from? Perhaps it is the experience of discrimination, be that sexism, racism, or classism. Perhaps drinking or eating addictively is but the symptom of the problem—our patriarchal culture based on dominance and submission, which is what we really need recovery from.

Without social and political changes, which bring all equally into participation with options for educational and economic prosperity, co-dependency cannot end. Our collective co-dependency is rooted in the culture and our raising of the next generation. It is also deeply imbedded in our individual psyches, which is where the self-help literature can benefit us. But to have the map take us the full distance, we need to make changes in our schools, churches, nations, and fabric of our society. Then, co-dependency will have no reason to exist.

Carol A. Plummer, M.S.W., is a therapist and trainer who lives in Kalamazoo, Mich. She frequently speaks and trains on a variety of women's and children's issues including co-dependency, sexual assault, and child abuse. She can be contacted at P.O. Box 421, Kalamazoo, MI 49005.

"For co-dependents, the most important discovery in the journey to wholeness and salvation is awareness that nothing they can do or not do will stop the stream of God's love flowing into their lives."



by Marlene Kropf

A Healing Stream

If ever there were a classic co-dependent, the woman of Samaria must have been one. Coming all alone at noon to draw water, she may have hoped to avoid meeting others from her town. Was her self-esteem so fragile that she could not face their questions and comments? Was she, perhaps, addicted to relationships and completely dependent on the approval of men? Had she been a victim of abuse or incest or a rigid religious background?

When Jesus asked her for a drink of water, she demurred. Couldn't he see that she was not worthy of such a request?

The Samaritan woman revealed herself as a person without power. She was circumscribed by the traditions of the fathers and could not respond to a situation which called for her to trust her own perceptions. When Jesus looked deeply into her heart, however, he saw how wounded she was and recognized her desire for deliverance.

The amazing gift which Jesus offered the woman of Samaria is the same gift which I have seen women receive over and over again in spiritual direction. Jesus offered her a spring of water within welling up to eternal life—an inner source of power and strength which would delight her and heal her and set her free to share the good news of God's salvation.

During the past four years as I have worked with a variety of people in spiritual direction, I have seen many women who longed for the life-giving stream within. When women are co-dependent, however, two obstacles often stand in the way: lack of a sense of self-worth and a debilitating image of God. Even though they are women of faith and would say they believe God is loving and good, a distorted God-image functions at the core of their being.

Shriveled self-worth prevents them from experiencing God's lavish grace. Just as they believe that they must finally earn everyone else's approval, they also believe that God's approval must be won by goodness or some other achievement. They cannot hold together the paradox that even though we are limited and sinful, we are also incredibly loved by God.

In the midst of their co-dependence, these women display remarkable courage as they say to God, "Give me this water so I may never thirst again." Their restoration often begins with the simple but painful step of reclaiming their own feelings. They take the risk of attending silent retreats where they become quiet enough to hear their own inner voices. They learn centering prayer and begin to acknowledge and then relinquish control of their anxious and troubled thoughts as they open themselves to God. They write with painful honesty in their journals and share their entries with a trusted spiritual friend.

One woman took the risk of "praying with clay." During a particularly stressful year, she regularly opened herself to God's presence with a ball of clay in her hands. As she prayed in silence, she shaped the clay in response to the images which arose within her. Her first attempts revealed her sense of desolation and separation from God. As she began to claim herself as God's loved child, the clay figures revealed an image of a God who was with her in the midst of struggle. When she looked back a year later, she discovered a series of shapes which told a story of healing and integration.

Dance became the medium of restoration for another woman. Her restrictive religious background had inhibited her ability to open herself to God, for God was always condemning and judgmental. She learned that when she put a piece of music on the phonograph and let herself move to the music, she would meet a loving God who welcomed her and invited her to wholeness.

For many women, meditation on scripture has been a healing path. One woman found that praying the psalms—particularly the lament psalms—was a key for unlocking her own inarticulate groanings. The psalms gave her permission to be herself before God and thus opened up the possibility of a genuine divine-human relationship. Other women have found many potent, life-giving images of God in the psalms which can replace harmful, defective images.

Another woman prayed the gospel stories. One by one she meditated on the stories of Jesus' encounters with women

• Women in Ministry

- **Reta Halteman Finger** of Oak Park, Ill. is on the awards committee of the Associated Church Press.
- **Susan Hornbostel** has been appointed director of fiscal services, Glencroft Retirement Community, Glendale, Ariz. She served previously as accounting director at a hospital in Champaign, Ill.
- **Elaine Moyer** has been appointed principal of Christopher Dock Mennonite High School, Lansdale, Pa., in July. She began her education career as a middle school teacher in Lima, Ohio. She then joined the faculty of Bluffton College.
- **Elizabeth Dominguez**, Old Testament scholar and teacher at two graduate schools in the Philippines, is visiting professor at AMBS.

• **Marlene Kropf** is the writer for an edition of *Adult Bible Study Guide* based on passages from Psalms, Proverbs, and other books. Kropf serves in the areas of congregational education, worship, and spirituality for Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries.

• **Harold and Ruth Yoder** became copastors of Prairie Street Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind. in the summer. They served previously as copastors of

University Mennonite Church, State College, Pa., and are currently studying at AMBS.

• **Toinette Eugene**, Chicago Theological Seminary, gave the Staley Distinguished Christian Scholar lecture at Goshen College. She spoke on "Can Faith Survive Injustice? A Question for Women in the Church."

• **Rachel Reesor-Taylor** of Montreal, is the recipient of the

and imaginatively entered into the action. She became the crippled woman in Luke 13 whom Jesus called forward and received his words, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Even though she always met a loving, healing Jesus, she also heard Jesus speak words of correction to her. In the midst of being chastened, she received courage to repent and be transformed.



For co-dependents, the most important discovery in the journey to wholeness and salvation is the awareness that nothing they can do or not do will stop the stream of God's love flowing into their lives. As they drink from the life-giving stream, they become bearers of salvation for others. And the destructive cycle of co-dependence is broken as God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Marlene Kropf, is a staff person and workshop leader with Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries in Elkhart, Ind.

Letters

- All my back issues are saved—they have also been read and shared by many.

This is a paper that should be widely read and talked about. I'll do my part to inform those who have never read it. —*Naomi Fast, Newton, Kan.*

- As a recent subscriber to *Report* I would like to request a copy of the issue on domestic help (No. 79). I recently worked (and was "let go") as a nanny, housekeeper in the U.S. I would like to know what *Report* said about domestic help. I may add that I felt belittled in my work as a domestic. Maybe I'm smart enough to know that I can find more meaningful work with a college degree. I also realize that the problem could have been with the family I worked with and their views of me or somebody else watching their children with a different lifestyle or own separate personality. —*Jeanne Meyer, Gratz, Ky.*
- Please add my name to your mailing list. *Report* comes across my desk at Mennonite Board of Missions and I always wish I had my own copy to share with others! Thanks for the thought provoking articles. Keep up the good work. —*Roma Miller, Goshen, Ind.*
- I enjoy the magazine very much and do want to continue receiving it. I also pass it along to several friends.
- I commend you for using recycled paper!
- The March-April (No. 89) issue briefly reported on "Athletes for Equality's petition to get rid of the swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated*. Do you have any additional information on this organization so persons like me could indicate our support? —*Grace L. Nolt, Harrisonburg, Va.*

AMBS lectureship stipend for women graduate students, an annual award to underwrite graduate-level research and provide teaching experience.

• **Dorothy Nickel Friesen** has resigned as pastor at Manhattan (Kan.) Fellowship to accept a position at AMBS as assistant academic dean.

• **Jeanne Rempel**, Upland, Calif., was recognized as a commissioned pastor by the

Southwest Mennonite Conference. She serves as copastor and church planter with her husband, Dennis, at Mennonite Community Fellowship.

• **Dorothy Jean Weaver**, assistant professor of New Testament at Eastern Mennonite Seminary has had her doctoral dissertation published by Sheffield Academic Press of Sheffield, England. Matthew's

Missionary Discourse: A Literary Critical Analysis represents the results of her doctoral study, which she completed in 1987 at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va. Weaver is a member of Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.

• **Kathy E. Schrag**, of Newton, Kan., was awarded an honorable mention in the Associated Church Press for her poem "Life to Life Resuscitation" published in *With* magazine.

• Your newsletter is always stimulating to me. I particularly related to the recent issue *Women: Bearing the Cross of Discipleship* (No. 90). My ancestry includes women whose selfless lives left only shells too empty to impart strength or hope or courage to the younger people who knew them. At the present, I too seem to be a disembodied shell.

Like Gayle Hunter Sheller in "Claiming Mary", I have pastored, confronted my personal limitations, resigned from the ministry, and now wonder if it is time that I turn to writing. I also discovered that in the demands of public ministry, I "had stifled my inner life, the part of my being that found home and creativity in solitude." I too knew deeply dedicated people in my life who had called me out and blessed me with affirmation and support in the ministry. I too enjoyed much of what I did in the pastorate, and grieved my loss when I resigned. During the year and a half since then, I have allowed some of the dark side of my experience with the church to surface.

Disillusioned with the inner workings of my denomination and aware of the human influence as God-ordained, I now feel estranged from the faith and spirituality that sustained and inspired me for 40 years. I feel adrift and sometimes hopeless. While pastoring, I allowed myself to become spiritually depleted. Where do I turn for an understanding of this pain? How do I reconcile the deep disappointment with the undying need to relate to a power greater than me?

While doubting and searching is usually said to lead to renewal, to greater depth, to a faith that is truly ones own, living in the midst of the process is frightening. Do I have to overcome these doubts before I dare to write or speak again? What if some doubts are never put to rest? I keep turning down invitations to preach or lead worship, and then bereate myself with "What's wrong with you? Shame on you for withholding yourself from others." Perhaps I can stop doing that and do as Sheller has done: claim Mary and gently tell Martha to be patient. Perhaps solitude is the clinic where the bandaging of my wounds can take place. —Peggy Voth, Calgary, Alberta

• I noticed in your March-April (No. 89) "News and Verbs" the story of Phil Baker-Shenk who takes his son to work several days a week because "I can be a lawyer the rest of my life, but I can only be a dad like this for a little while."

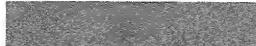
It is encouraging to see more men taking on non-traditional roles in our society such as primary child care.

I still find it amusing, however, that it is so newsworthy. I wondered if *Washington Post* (or *Report*) has printed recent articles about women who not only take a child to work but choose to postpone their careers and stay at home for the very reason Baker-Shenk states. They can have their careers the rest of their lives but they can only be a mother like this for a little while.

I applaud Baker Shenk and men like him but believe we should also applaud women who have chosen that route during a time when women are feeling the pressure to be liberated from the role of "only being a housewife." —Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, Bluffton, Ohio

• Congratulations as always on *Report*. I always read it faithfully and think it is so well done. I am wondering how much it would cost to get 150 copies of *Report* No. 88 with its wealth of material on aging. I would like to include it in a mailing. —Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Church Women United

• I am a research engineer and chief of projects in computer engineering. I am interested in women's issues. I would be most grateful to receive a free subscription to your publication. —Daniela Sirbu, Bucharest, Romania



News and Verbs

• A conference on domestic violence and sexual abuse is scheduled for November 2 and 3, 1990, in Upland, Calif. Upland Brethren in Christ Church will host the event.

"Shedding light on darkness: A Mennonite and Brethren in Christ response to violence and sexual abuse in the family," is being planned by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Domestic Violence Task Force, MCC's Committee on Women's Concerns and West Coast MCC.

Ruth Krall, associate professor of religion and psychology and director of peace studies at Goshen (Ind.) College, will be resource speaker. "I'll attempt to help participants, pastors and lay people, address the difficult issues the

church is facing internally," says Krall, who did a doctoral dissertation on women's healing after rape.

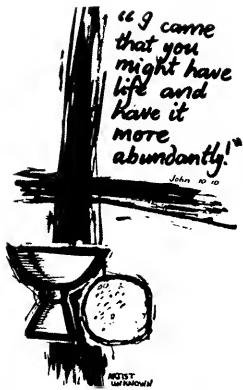
For more information or to register in the United States, contact MCC West Coast, 1010 G Street, Reedley, CA 93654; phone (209) 638-6911. In Canada contact MCC Canada Domestic Violence Task Force, PO Box 1292, Winkler, MB R6W 4B3; phone (204) 325-7514.

- **Learning Economics: Empowering Women for Action** is a new resource from The Religious Network for Equality for Women. The program gives women a process and method to connect their own economic experiences--in their families, the work force, their towns and regions--to events and changes in the economy as a whole. The goal is to help women understand that personal economic problems can't always be solved by personal decisions but come from systemic factors that need organization and action to change. For more information contact RNEW, 475 Riverside Dr., Rm. 812A, New York , NY 10115.
- Five Mennonite women participated in the First Latin American Encounter for Female Pastors, organized in Argentina by the Latin American Council of Churches.
- They were Ana Maria Reyes of Nicaragua, Beatriz Barrios and Milka Rindzinski or Uruguay, Yolanda Luz Rosas Salamanca of Guatemala and Carmen de Minino of the Dominican Republic. In all, 85 women from 19 countries and 11 faith communites met as representatives of the at least 250 female pastors of the continent who, formally ordained or not, are active in urban and rural areas and with a diversity of ministries: pastoral, indigenous, rural, popular, in conflicts, racial issues, aging and education. Theologian Elsa Tamez presented talks of Genesis 2-3 and on the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith.
- On March 8, 1887, 129 women in Chicago died when the owner of the factory where they worked set fire to the building to avoid meeting the women's demands for fewer work hours and better pay. In Brazil, March 8 was Women's Day, held to remember the struggles of women worldwide for a better life.

In the rural land settlement of Pitanga in northeast Brazil, MCCers helped the local women's group plan an afternoon commemoration this past March 8, inviting women from other poor communities to join them. Each group shared a drama, song, or speech telling about their struggles. General Conference worker, Rose Graber, brought six women from the Recife Mennonite Evangelical church who shared in song and testimony

how Jesus' love has given them worth and dignity, enabling them to confront the problems in their homes and communities.

- Feminist organizations in Peru have united in a decision to publicly protest the level of violence in their country. They are publicizing incidents of domestic violence, women's marginal place in society, and political assassinations and disappearances, especially of women.
- In an address by former Nigerian head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo said, "Now, in our part of the world, with all due respect, women are completely abused. They work on the farm. While they are busy, the men are drinking in the village bazaars. They cook, they rear the children.... We have a culture that does not give women the recognition that they deserve... If we are going to control the problem of population explosion, women have to play a critical part. I think their education—their empowerment—will make the difference between whether we succeed or fail. Somebody has suggested that we should have a ministry of women's affairs. I don't believe in that. I believe that we should have women leaders really speaking out and asserting themselves.... We have to fight and struggle to get more education for women and get them into the mainstream of national life."
- In Cambridge, Mass. the Reverend Jesse Jackson said that the moral character of Harvard Law School was on trial in the current dispute over the school's failure to appoint a black woman to its tenured faculty. He noted that "To say in 1990 there is no African-American woman qualified for appointment to Harvard Law School is both an error and a gross insult to our intelligence. It is humiliating."
- In April, the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women was celebrated in Vancouver, B.C. at a one-day event called the "Women's Ecumenical Congress 1990." More than 190 women representing Mennonite, United, Anglican, Catholic, Baptist and Lutheran participated in worship, Bible study, music and workshops.
- Mennonite Mutual Aid is looking for a health underwriter, a group underwriter, a programmer/analyst and a product development manager. Candidates for all these positions must have a commitment to Christian values as interpreted by the Mennonite Church. For more information contact MMA, 1110 North Main St., Goshen, IN 46526



Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

• An international gathering of Mennonite women leaders took place at Montevideo during the Second Latin American Mennonite Consultation. During that conference, women from throughout Latin America had a meeting to share their experiences. None of the participants had been ordained by a church. Although some expressed satisfaction with their service, the testimony of others was that they still did not have adequate space in their communities for the development and utilization of their gifts. It was felt that it would be a good idea to plan regional women's meetings with the purpose of treating themes important to women and of forming a network of fellowship and commitment. It was recommended to look for such opportunities in other meetings of the Mennonite community in general, such as, for example, at the Mennonite World Conference sessions in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

• Sylvia Booth, coordinator for Alternatives to Abortion Ministries at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta, said some colleges and universities unwittingly contribute to abortions by imposing harsh penalties on women students who become pregnant out of wedlock. If such a student "aborts and no one finds out, she is allowed to remain on campus in school housing and can keep her scholarship," she said. "But if she chooses to carry her child, accepting responsibility for her actions, she is often expelled from school and stripped of her scholarships while the father of the same baby is allowed to remain in school."

• A study of ethics in the parish reveals one minister in ten reports having an affair with a parishioner. Karen Lebacqz is a professor of Christian ethics at the Pacific School of Religion and a minister of the United Church of Christ. She said her four-year research study has found that while one minister in ten reports having had an affair with a member of the congregation virtually all of the ministers in the study said they were sexually attracted at least once to someone in the congregation.

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

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**Mennonite
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21 South 12th Street
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